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ABSTRACT

Reflections of a retiring superintendent on the role of the superintendency are presented in this paper, which is based on an autobiographical account. The author decided to become a superintendent to validate the hypothesis that a superintendent could function as an educational and instructional leader, rather than as only a manager. Areas in which he was unprepared for his job included dealing with teachers' unions and school boards; rewards were found in new program development and empowerment of teachers and administrators. Concerns about the future of education include the survival of public education in the United States, the tenure of superintendents, and community collaboration to address social problems. Nine recommendations for aspiring superintendents are listed, some of which include placing educational goals above managerial ones, building coalitions, and providing opportunities for professional growth. A superintendent preparation program at the University of Pittsburgh is described. (27 references) (LMI)

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ON EXITING THE SUPERINTENDENCY: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ON EXITING THE SUPERINTENDENCY: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Richard C. Wallace, Jr.

As I reflect on exiting the superintendency, I found it necessary to review my experience as a teacher, a principal, an assistant superintendent and a researcher. These positions helped shape the values and expectations that influenced significantly my perception of the superintendent's role. Also, my experiences with the development of new programs and with applied research and evaluation both prior to and as a superintendent have profoundly influenced my actions and achievements.

WHY DID I BECOME A SUPERINTENDENT?

As a doctoral student, I often said to my peers that I would never become a superintendent of schools. I made that statement because, as a teacher and principal, I saw superintendents primarily engaging in managerial work. My perception was that superintendents spent most of their time on the four B's of education: budgets, buses, buildings and bonds. Rarely did I see superintendents functioning as educational leaders. Thus, I initially intended to spend my career as an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction because my primary interests are in the educational process.

I now am about to retire from the superintendency after nineteen years of service: seven in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and twelve in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Why did I become a superintendent? What

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made me change my mind? I became a superintendent because I decided to verify my hypothesis that a superintendent could be an educational leader. I set myself up as an experiment. I wanted to try to prove to myself and to the profession that a superintendent could function as an educational and instructional leader and not just a manager. I wanted to see if I could operationalize the title of a book I once read. The book, The Superintendent as Instructional Leader published by The American Association of School Administrators, (1957) expressed the values I held. Yet I had not actually seen superintendents exercising this type of leadership.

WHAT DID I BRING TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY?

I assumed my first superintendency in 1973 in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. Prior to that position, I had spent fourteen years in public education and five years in educational research and development work.

Of my fourteen years in public education, four were spent as an elementary and junior high school teacher; three years as a teaching principal, five years as an elementary principal; and two years as Director of Elementary and Middle School Education. These years of experience spanned rural, suburban and urban communities.

My most formative years in public education were spent in the wealthy suburban community of Weston, Massachusetts, ten miles west of Boston. While working in that community I finished my doctoral studies at Boston College. As a principal in Weston, I was sent to the Harvard-Lexington Program for Team Teaching and Process Education by the district Superintendent. The school district was very active in implementing these two innovations. The following year I was

appointed to a "junior faculty" position in this Harvard summer program as it moved into the city of Boston and became known as the Harvard-Boston Program.

During the years in Weston, I became highly involved with faculty from Harvard, Boston University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Boston College. The district viewed itself as being on the "cutting edge" of educational reform. My experiences in this district and with university personnel built a commitment to team teaching, process oriented education, and assessment of learning outcomes. My doctoral dissertation (Wallace 1966) verified Jerome Bruner's hypotheses that..."any subject can be taught in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development." (Bruner 1960, p.33).

As Director of Elementary and Middle Schools in Holliston, Massachusetts, I engaged in my first intensive efforts in staff development (Wallace 1968). In this position I had the opportunity to apply the Harvard-Lexington model of team teaching and process education by designing and operating an eight-week summer training program for middle school teachers. During this time I worked with my colleague, George Madaus of Boston College, to develop an achievement monitoring system for process oriented education.

I left public school administration in 1968 to become a National Postdoctoral Fellow in Educational Research at Stanford University, sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education. Following the fellowship, I served for two years as Director of Evaluation, Deputy Director and, ultimately, Director of the Eastern Regional Institute for Education (ERIE) in Syracuse, New York. ERIE was one of the

federal government's Regional Educational Laboratories. At ERIE, I worked with staff to sharpen the issues related to process-oriented education and to identify ways in which that institution could study effectively the implementation of process-oriented education in selected school districts in upper New York and Western Pennsylvania. A book written by Henry Cole (1972) describes the work of that institution. These values have, to a large extent, influenced significantly my orientation toward curricula and instructional issues.

In 1971, I assumed the position of Deputy Director of the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin. In this position, I had the responsibility for program planning and evaluation. In 1973, I decided to leave research and development work for two reasons: my frustration with the constantly shifting research and development priorities of the federal government; the difficulty of getting work accomplished because of continuing uncertainty of funding. Thus, I decided to return to public school administration to see if I could implement my educational values as a superintendent of schools.

I brought to the superintendency in Fitchburg, Massachusetts in 1973 some very strong educational beliefs based on my training and experience. First, because of my background in evaluation and my interest in assessment of learning, I brought a very strong belief in what was then termed "measurement driven instruction." I believed then that if one could develop good measures of student learning outcomes, one could use these criteria to influence significantly the way teachers taught. I further believed if teachers could use testing

data diagnostically and plan instruction based on the analyses of those data, they could improve the educational achievement of students. Along with my views of instructional management, I brought a very strong data orientation based on my years in planning, research and development work (Wallace 1984). Because of my work at Stanford, ERIE, and the University of Texas, I had very strong vision of decision-oriented evaluation systems and a great belief in the use of data to guide decision-making, planning and evaluation. While at the University of Texas, for example, my colleagues and I developed and pilot tested a Decision Oriented Evaluation System (DOES) (Wallace 1973) for the Texas Department of Community Affairs. DOES was designed to help non-evaluators use data to make decisions about continuation, modification or termination of programs for which they were responsible.

I also brought to my work at Texas knowledge of the change process developed from implementing new curricula in schools. That perspective was further enhanced as I designed and developed research plans with my colleagues at the University of Texas, for the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) (Hall, Wallace, Dossett, 1972). CBAM views change as a process of growth for individuals and institutions as they engage in the implementation of educational innovations (Hall and Hord, 1984). This strong belief toward and an understanding of the change process greatly influenced my view of the role of the superintendent as a change facilitator.

While at the University of Texas, I also engaged in applying the research in organizational development. This work centered on research, development and dissemination of the University's

Personalized Teacher Education Program. I had the opportunity to work with some key leaders in educational change and organizational development during those years (e.g., Richard Schmuck, Philip Runkel).

Finally, because of my position and experience at the University of Texas, I brought to the superintendency a great deal of experience in program planning and strategic long-range planning.

In summary then, I brought to the superintendency a set of values and experiences that went beyond the usual preparation that one has for a superintendency. Not only did these values, beliefs and experiences influence my action, they served as a basis for attempting to validate my hypothesis that one indeed could function as an educational/instructional leader as superintendent of schools.

WHAT WAS I UNPREPARED FOR AS A SUPERINTENDENT?

When I left public education in 1968, teacher unions had not yet emerged. As I returned to public education as a superintendent in 1973, teacher unionism had taken a strong foothold in Massachusetts. I was clearly unprepared for the onslaught of grievances, collective bargaining and related other issues (e.g., during my first month as Superintendent of Schools in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the teacher union filed 27 grievances). I learned in those seven years in Fitchburg how to deal effectively with union leaders. However, the initial posture had to be one of response to confrontation. During the first three years, the union found that it could not intimidate me or win at the grievance and arbitration table. Following their lack of success, we declared a "truce" and then developed a good working relationship during my final four years as Superintendent.

Beginning in 1980, as Superintendent in Pittburgh, I was able to develop, rather quickly, an effective working relationship with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers. Over the course of my twelve years as a superintendent, we have achieved three "early bird" settlements of teachers' contracts. In 1985, we settled a teacher contract one year prior to its expiration; in 1988, a contract was settled six months prior to its expiration; in 1991, we settled a contract eight months prior to its expiration. An effective working relationship between myself, the Board of Education, and the Union, as cited in the recent RAND Study (Hill, Wise and Shapiro, 1989), clearly provided the foundation for progress in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

My training as an administrator had not prepared me to work closely with boards of education. In my two superintendencies, I have worked with approximately 75 different board members. Perhaps the one constant statement that can be made is that boards change. In 1992, as I prepare to retire from Pittsburgh, there is only board member left who hired me as the superintendent in 1980. When I left Fitchburg, Massachusetts, in 1980 after serving seven years, again, there was only one board member left who had hired me in 1973.

No amount of course work really prepares one to deal effectively with individual board members or the board as a whole. I found that dealing with the board in establishing priorities based on a needs assessment was a very effective way of bringing the board together to agree on priorities for the district (Cooley and Bickel, 1986, pp. 183-196).

HOW DID I EXERCISE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AS A SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS?

I believe that I have demonstrated that a superintendent can be an educational leader. I believe that my actions and my writings and those of my colleagues have demonstrated that a superintendent can communicate an educational vision to a district and lead a district in the pursuit of improved educational outcomes for students (Wallace 1985). In nineteen years as a superintendent, I have spent a substantial portion of my time working directly with individual principals, teachers, and central office personnel in pursuit of educational programming. I would judge that at least 50% of my time over the nineteen years has been spent in pursuing, directly and indirectly, improved educational outcomes (Wallace 1987).

I have a very strong belief that a data orientation in educational leadership is critical to one's success in the role (See Cooley and Bickel 1986). I believe that I have demonstrated, particularly in my years in Pittsburgh, that I have used data wisely and well to lead the system, to help it identify its problems, to help it to design solutions and interventions, and to validate program outcomes (Wallace 1986).

I believe, also, that I have been able to demonstrate that a superintendent who is organized to promote the development of individuals and schools as problem-solving institutions can make a significant impact on individuals and schools. (Wallace, Radvak-Shovlin, Piscolish and LeMahieu 1990). I believe that I have promoted the professionalism of teachers through the Teacher Centers established in Pittsburgh. The work of my colleagues and I at the

Schenley High School Teacher Center, in particular, has provided a contribution to the literature on teacher staff development (Wallace, LeMahieu, Bickel 1990; Wallace, Johnston and Bickel 1990; Bickel, Denton, Johnston, LeMahieu, and Young, 1987). Additionally, the training of principals through the Principals' Academies and similar long-range staff development activities, exemplify the contribution that can be made to the improvement of individuals and professionals (DeFigio, Zigmond and LeMahieu 1990).

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY?

As I look back on my nineteen years as a superintendent, clearly the most rewarding aspects of my career have related to new program development. As superintendent in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the development of a variety of initiatives related to Skills Achievement Monitoring (SAM) and competency testing were important in my exercise of leadership (Wallace 1979; Wallace and Reidy 1979; Wallace and Reidy 1978). The SAM Program in Fitchburg was validated for statewide dissemination (Wallace and Reidy, 1980).

The highlight of my educational leadership in Pittsburgh has centered around achievement monitoring and professional development. The development and implementation of the Monitoring Achievement in Pittsburgh (MAP) Program (Wallace 1983) did much to move the district to improve student achievement in basic skills.

I had always dreamed of developing an examination system for students as a means of raising students' levels of expectations. I had that opportunity in Pittburgh with the Syllabus Examination Program (Wallace 1985). The evolution of the Syllabus Examination Program has laid the foundation for the district's current

participation in the New Standards Project of the National Alliance for School Restructuring. I have learned a great deal about the use of criterion referenced tests and examinations as a means of promoting instructional reform and curriculum development. As I leave the superintendency, I have great faith that the proposed system of national examinations being developed by the New Standards Project hold much promise for the improvement of American education (Resnick and Resnick, 1985).

One of the most enjoyable experiences I had as a superintendent ended up being a complete failure. I worked with the Pittsburgh Administrators Association and a group of business executives to develop a "pay for performance system" for administrators in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. I spent three years of rather intense work bringing the Administrators Association to understand and accept, I thought, the need for a pay for performance system. The performance evaluation system was developed at the direction of the Board that wanted to reward outstanding administrators in the district and not to reward those who were not performing well. After three years of intensive work, we brought the system to the Board for their approval. In a joint meeting between the Board and the Pittsburgh Administrators Association, the Board emphatically declared its intent to support and get on with the implementation of the system. However, in the time between the joint meeting of the Board and the Administrators Association and the subsequent Board Legislative Meeting, the Administrators Association lobbied the Board very successfully. As a result, the Board decided against implementing the performance evaluation system. While I can now

look back upon the three-year effort and smile at the final outcome, I learned a great deal in the process. I learned that "politics" as opposed to reasoned dialogue can be more important in determining the final outcome of program implementation.

In retrospect, I believe that my greatest sense of accomplishment as a superintendent lies in the empowerment and advancement of teachers and administrators. As I look back over my career as a superintendent, I can cite innumerable teachers and administrators who were significantly changed as a result of their engagement in a variety of professional development activities. Whether these activities involved the development of tests, curricula, examinations, or staff development training, I can visualize scores of teachers and administrators who view their professional world differently now as a result of growth experiences provided to them. Perhaps, the greatest accomplishment in my role as educational leader, has been to enable teachers and administrators to believe that they can make a difference. Recently, as I announced my retirement, a teacher who had been affected by my work in the District, wrote the following:

> "I believe the loftiest title in a school district is that of classroom teacher. Through your vision you have enabled me to stay in the classroom and keep that distinguished title while making a contribution to our school district. I recall a moment in Conference Room 300 at the Schenley High School Teacher Center, you came to give your charge to the newly appointed Phase Two Facilitators. You said, 'one of you, acting in your role as change agent can change the direction of the school district'. I believed you were talking directly to me. To this day I have acted accordingly.
>
> As a teacher, I receive surprise visits and letters from former students

sharing how they believe I've made a difference in their lives...your leadership enabled my professional development.

In the future, when the details of our experience fade to an impression and you question your real accomplishments, set five minutes aside to reread this letter of gratitude and know that you have made a difference."

WHAT CONCERNS DO I HAVE ON LEAVING THE SUPERINTENDENCY?

As I prepare to step down from the superintendency, three concerns are uppermost in my mind. The first concern is for the survival of public education in America. It is my belief that the decade of the 1990s will be crucial in determining the future of public education. I have written on many occasions (Wallace 1991) my concerns about the future of public education. A significant battle is being waged now in the large cities of this nation. If city schools cannot demonstrate that they are effective in meeting the needs of poor and minority children by the end of this decade, in my judgment, public schools will fail to exist (Wallace 1990a). Legislators and the general public will develop alternatives. If public education fails in the cities, I believe it will begin to lose its support in suburban and rural districts as well. I believe that the decade of the 1990s will witness significant changes in public education designed to make it more effective; or public education, as we know it, will cease to exist.

My second concern relates to the tenure of superintendents. After twelve years in Pittsburgh, I am the "Dean" of the large city superintendents in the nation. During my twelve years in Pittburgh many large cities (e.g., Denver, CO; Baltimore, MD) have had as many

as five superintendents. It is a tragedy that many of my peers have been unable to achieve the length of tenure that I have enjoyed in Pittsburgh. In 1990 there were over twenty openings for superintendents in the large cities of this nation (Gursky, 1992). The average tenure of a superintendent in a large district is now less than three years. Clearly the pressure to "perform miracles" in a short period of time plagues the large city superintendent. Those of us in education know that there are no "quick fixes." However, the general public, boards of education, state legislators, and others believe that there are quick fixes. Unless superintendents have a minimum of five years of leadership in an urban district, I do not believe that they can accomplish very much. In my judgment, it takes a full decade to make a significant educational impact on an urban district. Unless we can find ways to prepare urban superintendents to anticipate and cope with the problems that they will encounter in city school districts and provide them with the knowledge and the skills to address successfully those problems, American education in cities cannot flourish (Wallace 1990b). We must find ways through changes in training or changes in governance to permit superintendents to exercise educational leadership for longer periods of time.

The third concern relates to the social problems that permeate this country and are having a powerfully negative impact on public schools. The prevalence of drugs, crime, violent behavior that children and youth observe in their communities, in the electronic and print media, pose difficult problems for education. Schools are a microcosm of the larger society. Thus, we are seeing in the 1990s

an increase of drugs, weapons and violent behavior in the schools. What is even more troubling is that many young people come to school today without a set of "moral values." Because of the social and peer pressures which they experience in their homes, schools, and in the community, many urban students lack a sense of morality. That is, they have little sense of the value or respect toward life or property. They fail to respect the person, the property, or the rights of their peers. They are prone to verbal and physical violence. These conditions provide a troublesome set of environmental conditions that adversely affect teaching, learning, and administration of schools. Superintendents must find ways to forge collaboratives with community agencies to address these critical issues. (Wallace 1991)

WHAT ADVICE DO I OFFER TO ASPIRING SUPERINTENDENTS?

As I reflect on nearly two decades of experience as a superintendent I offer the following advice to those who wish to pursue a career in this field.

1. Place educational goals above managerial goals. While it is necessary to provide for the efficient management of schools and school districts, these responsibilities can be delegated to competent staff. While the superintendent retains the ultimate responsibility for management, overseeing the work of others in management will provide one with the time to address educational matters. Make this your top priority. Think of yourself as a Superintendent of Education rather than a Superintendent of Schools.

2. Build coalitions among parents, business, college and university personnel to support the educational process. Building

coalitions to support financial issues and educational issues will be important in the 1990s and the 21st century. To develop a consensus for school restructuring will require understanding and support from the general public as well as parents.

3. Build coalitions among social service agencies to insure effective communication among those agencies to improve the quality of service to children, youth and their families. To insure that children of today are educable, the schools can play an important role in helping parents access important health, mental health, and other family services.

4. Recognize that one of the most important responsibilities of the superintendent is to insure the continuing professional growth of teachers, administrators, and support personnel. Develop the commitment of the Board of Education to support this growth.

5. Hold high expectations for all employees. Communicate those expectations by articulating a vision for the school district. Insure that all parties to the educational process understand and support the educational vision you espouse; let these constituencies help to develop and communicate the vision. Evaluate employees on the extent to which they contribute to the attainment of the vision.

6. Develop a balance between your personal and professional life. The superintendency is a very demanding job. Balancing family and professional responsibilities is very important. Engage in vigorous physical exercise to reduce stress and maintain your health.

7. Develop good listening skills. Lending an empathetic ear to parents, professionals and staff goes a long way toward resolving

problems. The ability to use conflict resolution skills to diffuse problem situations is also vital to the success of a superintendent.

8. Develop a good working relationship with union leaders. Work at it. The achievement of an effective educational system depends upon a good working relationship among union leadership, Boards of Education and administration.

9. Realize that you can make a difference in the lives of students and professionals through effective educational leadership. Help create the conditions that support both pupils and professionals. Force them to "stretch" beyond their current status to evolve to a higher level of achievement.

10. Develop a network among your peers so that you can learn from them and share with them. The superintendency can by a lonely job; gain support from peers to help you maintain a proper perspective on your work. Learn to leave your problems in the office behind locked doors when you leave at night. Learn to pace yourself to maintain your mental and physical health.

WHAT WILL I DO AFTER EXITING THE SUPERINTENDENCY?

I am looking forward to a new career as a Clinical Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Pittsburgh. During the past two years, I have worked with my superintendent and university colleagues to design a new program to prepare superintendents. During the 1990-91 academic year, I spent a half year sabbatical leave working with the university faculty to help design the program and specify the outcomes (Wallace, In Press). A description of the program follows:

The Superintendent's Preparation Program at the University of Pittsburgh is based on four fundamental assumptions:

1. The superintendent is an educational leader who needs a coherent view of educational processes and outcomes in order to lead effectively.
2. The superintendent is a producer and consumer of information who needs to be able to gather, use and report to various publics a wide array of information that describe the "state of a school district" in relation to other school districts and its own past present and future vision.
3. The superintendent is a growth facilitator for individuals and schools who needs to support and encourage the continuing personal and professional development of teachers, administrators, staff and board members to insure that they improve their individual and collective problem solving abilities.
4. The superintendent is an effective manager of human and financial resources who needs to be able to: manage and resolve conflict; work with various constituencies; share decision making; communicate effectively with the media and various publics; negotiate with employee groups; promote collaboration among agencies that provide services to children, youth and their families.

These assumptions provide the conceptual framework for the program. The framework posits four interactive domains; VISION, DATA ORIENTATION, ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, MANAGEMENT.

The domains provide the organizing principles for planning, program development, program delivery, evaluation and research. Knowledge, skills and their interaction within each domain and across all domains provide program integration.

In addition to conventional coursework, the program places great emphasis on field studies, use of computers, and clinical experiences. It promotes collaboration among faculty, students, practicing superintendents and central office administrators in designing, delivering and evaluation of the program.

The goal of the program is to produce effective, reflective, visionary leaders for the schools of Western Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth and the nation.

It is my belief that superintendents prepared as described above will be able to cope with the demands and face the challenges that the 21st century will bring to education. It is my hope that the preparation program at the University of Pittsburgh will enable new superintendents to lengthen their tenure in a school district and thus influence positively the education of children and youth.

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